



[A Good Man is Hard to Find](#), by Flannery O'Connor

In A Nutshell

Some readers think "A Good Man is Hard to Find" is a cynical tale, uncompromising in the way it brings out human pettiness and manipulation. Others think it's a black comedy worthy of a Cohen brothers' short film, or a twisted cartoon. Or perhaps it's a horror story. Still others think it's an uplifting depiction of the mysterious ways God works through human beings over and above their own wills. Maybe it's even all of these at once?

Since it was first published, "A Good Man is Hard to Find" has been Flannery O'Connor's best-known story. Though she'd written it in 1953, the story was published in 1955 as part of a collection with the same name, *A Good Man is Hard to Find and Other Stories*. Her second published work, the collection established Flannery O'Connor as a major voice in American literature, and particularly Southern literature, until her early death (at the age of 39) in 1964. It also brought her fame as a modern master of the short story (her novels were critically less successful).

Even during O'Connor's lifetime, her works provoked very different reactions in her readers. Many readers and critics found them consistently "grotesque" in their depiction of debased, repulsive (and usually unsympathetic) characters and their at times spectacular displays of violence or cruelty. Some appreciated them as comedies for this reason, while others reacted with disgust. "A Good Man is Hard to Find," as O'Connor's most popular story, frequently stood at the center of discussion. It was also, for that reason, the story about which the author

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herself spoke most often (she also gave several public readings of it).

O'Connor saw all of her fiction, certainly including this story, as realistic, demandingly un sentimental, but ultimately hopeful. Her inspiration as a writer came from a deeply felt faith in Roman Catholicism, which she claimed informed all of her stories. She wrote, "The stories are hard but they are hard because there is nothing harder or less sentimental than Christian realism" (source: *The Habit of Being*, p. 90). A recurrent theme throughout her writings was the action of divine grace in the horribly imperfect, often revolting, generally funny world of human beings, a theme very much present in "A Good Man is Hard to Find." This story affords perhaps the best place to start in exploring the work of this rather eccentric, certainly unique literary voice.

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Big Picture Study Questions

- 1 All right, we've got to ask it: do you think the moment of grace is a moment of grace? Why or why not? How does the story change if it isn't?
- 2 If the grandmother's moment of grace isn't actually a moment of grace, what is it? And how do you interpret The Misfit's reaction to it?
- 3 Could the grandmother have something like the moment of grace without bringing God into the picture? How would that change the story?

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